

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MUSCAT 000930

SIPDIS

SENSITIVE

STATE FOR NEA/PI, NEA/ARPI
ABU DHABI FOR MEPI
USDOC FOR JAMES FILPI, OFFICE OF GENERAL COUNSEL

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [SCUL](#) [KMPI](#) [KISL](#) [PGOV](#) [ECON](#) [MU](#)

SUBJECT: TAKING SHARIA OUT OF LAW SCHOOL?

Summary

1. (SBU) The Dean of the College of Sharia and Law has confirmed rumors that the government will split up his institution, folding the law college into Sultan Qaboos University while the Sharia students will be sent to a religious institute. While the Dean expects the organizational shift to be accompanied by a new emphasis in the law curriculum on modern commercial law, with the help of the U.S. Department of Commerce, a leading law practitioner cautions that a background in Sharia remains essential for lawyers in Oman. Public reactions to the rumors largely voice concern on the government's move away from Islamic education. End summary.

A Coming Split

2. (SBU) Rumors have persisted for weeks on the local Internet message boards about the dissolution of the College of Sharia and Law, Oman's most prominent training institution for lawyers and judges. Dr. Mubarak al-Rashdi (protect), Dean of the College and a participant in 2004 in Southern Methodist University's Rule of Law Forum, confirmed the rumors in a recent meeting with Embassy staff. Although not yet made public, the Higher Education Council, chaired by Minister of the Diwan of the Royal Court Sayyid Ali al-Busaidi, has decided to split the college in two as part of an effort to de-emphasize Sharia law education. The current college buildings will be devoted entirely to law students, and will come under the umbrella of Sultan Qaboos University (SQU), Oman's leading public university. The Sharia students will be transferred to the Institute of Sharia Studies, run by the Royal Diwan. Among other things, it means the law students will graduate with university degrees, while the Sharia students will still only be awarded a diploma.

Following the U.S. Model?

3. (SBU) Dr. Mubarak indicated that the general expectation is that the new law school will teach commercial, private and public law. Indeed, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Commercial Law Development Program has been working closely with the College on developing a new curriculum. Dr. Mubarak and two other College officials traveled to Washington and Kansas earlier this year at CLDP's behest, and were so impressed with the University of Kansas' law school that they decided to emulate the U.S. system rather than the Australian model they had previously decided to copy.

Sharia Not Without Supporters

4. (SBU) Said al-Shahry (protect), chairman of the Majlis al-Shura (Consultative Council) Legal Affairs Committee and head of one of Oman's largest private law firms, has somewhat different expectations. Having received an education in both Sharia and law at Ain Shams University (Egypt), al-Shahry told us on June 6 that having a Sharia background is essential to practicing law in Oman, even in the commercial realm in which his firm almost exclusively operates. Having worked for the past two years as a guest lecturer in law at Sultan Qaboos University, he predicted that Sharia would remain at least a part of the law school curriculum. He nevertheless strongly praised the decision to bring the law college under SQU's aegis, saying it will have a strongly beneficial impact to both the College and the University.

5. (U) Reactions on the Internet message board Al-Sablah, however, were less effusive. Many respondents charged that it is a blatant attempt by the government to curb Islamic education or even to prevent citizens from "learning their

rights." (Note: Some Omanis remain upset at the Education Ministry's abrupt decision in 2004 to change the "Islamic Studies" curriculum in grades 11 and 12 to "Islamic Culture."

End note.) A few voices, however, speculated that the government's move was intended to limit the number of unemployed Sharia school graduates in the labor market.

Comment

16. (SBU) The break-up of the College of Sharia and Law, once announced, may either usher in a major reform of the law school curriculum or just represent an organizational restructuring to bring the isolated college under university administration. There have been widespread discussions among legal and business professionals, particularly following Oman's 2000 accession to the WTO and its active efforts to adopt Free Trade Agreements with the U.S. and other states, on the need for an Omani legal framework steeped in the globalized economy. It is therefore difficult to believe that Oman would pass up this golden opportunity to effect a paradigm shift in the way they educate their legal and judicial class. That said, Oman's Personal Status Law, effecting family law, inheritance and other critical social issues, remains founded on Sharia.
BALTIMORE